

THE LOVING CHOICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF DETROIT NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING NEWSLETTER

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Merry Christmas



TLC, The Loving Choice

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- Anyone who has a story to share is encouraged to send it to TLC for printing.
- If you would like someone to write on a specific topic contact TLC 313-292-1294. We will find someone to research the topic for publication!!!
- Send a donation for NFP classes, which are offered free of charge.



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What Is A Serious Reason?

By: Laura Jennings

You have heard it before; couples using NFP may use the method to postpone a pregnancy for serious reasons. In the middle of child rearing the serious reason may be obvious. We need sleep! When the baby begins sleeping and the older children gain some independence, the longing for another newborn creeps into your heart. Then comes the question:

“Should we or shouldn’t we?”

Life or death issues on the part of the parents or existing children tend to be no-brainers for postponing pregnancy. Obviously, a life threatening “anything” would qualify as a serious reason to postpone pregnancy. How does a couple with less obvious issues know when their family has grown large enough? There is only one correct answer to this question – God’s answer. God weaves into his plan the perfect number of children for your family. Each couple must answer this question through thoughtful prayer. The answer is not the same for any two couples. Each marital relationship is unique. One couple’s serious reason to postpone a pregnancy may be another couple’s green light to have another baby.

The first priority for a couple must be to maintain a Christ centered, intact marriage. A giving of one’s self to one’s spouse. Together, couples then accommodate the needs of their children. The priority list then jumps to church, livelihood, and other obligations outside of the home. The number of children a couple should create can be prayerfully found somewhere within the first two priorities. Each of us was born with gifts and abilities that we have brought with us to our marriages. It is a blend of those gifts and abilities that expands or limits our family sizes. Having another child is a serious consideration. The physical, emotional, social, and financial needs (not wants) of the family must all be prayerfully considered. Can the needs of each spouse still be met with the addition of another child? Can the individual needs of the existing children be met if you give them another sibling. Each family is made up of a complex set of unique individuals. This is why the answer takes much soul searching and will be different for each family.

The good news is that God created each of us. He already knows our abilities and our limitations. He knows that many couples can maintain and share a healthy relationship with 6 or more children. He also knows and loves the couples who are called to serve him in other vocations and may only be able to share themselves with one child, and in some cases, no children at all. It is important for all couples to keep their hearts open to new life. Pray, and trust in our Heavenly Father to help you discern whether or not your serious reasons to postpone a pregnancy are truly “serious”. Remember, during the sacrament of marriage, couples receive all the Grace they will need to serve their spouse and any children they create together. It is up to each married couple to prayerfully consider, with pure hearts and intentions, to what number their family will grow.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING AND ABSTINENCE: A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

By: Thomas L. Mulcahy

I have been asked to write about abstinence. Who wants to write about abstinence? Isn't abstinence a bad word in our culture? Even those of us who practice NFP sometimes have the tendency to tell others that the obvious down side to natural family planning is the necessity of abstinence during the fertile time.

Consider for a moment, however, the following line from C.S. Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*: "Those who are seriously attempting chastity are more conscious, and soon know a great deal more about their own sexuality than anyone else." What is Lewis saying? What does he mean when he claims that we can come to a greater appreciation of our sexuality by practicing chastity? He must mean, at least in the context of married love, that the reward for practicing chastity is a more gratifying and love enriching sex experience. I will explore this idea further from the perspective of practicing abstinence as part of the NFP method, and in particular from the male perspective.

One of the "myths" of male sexuality is that the man is incapable of practicing abstinence. This myth is fostered by an eros-based culture that emphasizes immediate sexual gratification over sexual fulfillment within marriage. With images of eros based love painting the cultural landscape, and then the landscape of men's minds, men are trained to see sexual pleasure as an end in and of itself. Moreover, since this need for immediate sexual gratification is often satisfied in the world of pornography, an illusory world is created where the woman in the image is always ready, willing and able to gratify the man's desires whenever the man is so inclined. This self-centered understanding of sex is then transferred to physical relationships as in the man who expects the woman to "put out" by the second date or he dumps her.

How then does a man come out of a view of sexuality, which may be primarily narcissistic and egotistical? How does the man keep erotic or passionate love from being an end in itself. Here is the answer: the man must place his eros love under the guardianship of self-giving love (agape love). Whereas contraceptive practices may serve to maintain a selfish attitude toward sexuality – primarily because the woman, rendered infertile, is in danger of becoming, more than ever, an object of the male sexual drive – natural family planning actually re-orientates the married couple toward the practice of self-giving sexuality.

Natural family planning encourages selfless-love and promotes the psychological health and well-being of a couple for a number of reason, all related to the man's willingness to practice periodic abstinence. First of all, natural family planning requires the man in the relationship to become more knowledgeable about his wife's reproductive system. To learn the art of natural family planning requires the man to learn about how his wife's

body works. This knowledge helps the man to understand the gift of a woman he has received in marriage and how his wife's body differs from his own. The man begins to understand in a much deeper sense that his wife's body, from a reproductive perspective, is constantly changing: she menstruates, then her body increases in fertility toward ovulation, and then she goes into a period of infertility. This helps the man to understand the "mystery of the body of the spouse" and the mystery of "the fertile time." This helps a man to love and appreciate who his wife is.

Secondly, natural family planning requires a man to equally participate with his wife in the burden of family planning. Natural family planning requires a man to be chaste with his wife when pregnancy is not desired, i.e., when she is in the fertile stage of her cycle. Chastity is in fact very beneficial to the relationship between husband and wife. By being chaste, the man shows to his wife that he does not view her merely as an object for sexual gratification, but as a beloved partner in the act of sexual intercourse. In this sense, the body of the other is loved as the "incarnation of a unique personality." When a man is willing to be chaste for the benefit of his wife, it is only natural that she will love him more because of that.

Third, natural family planning promotes greater openness and communication regarding sexuality between a husband and wife because both spouses are intimately involved in the family planning process. From personal experience, I can relate that a man is not going to practice natural family planning without taking great interest as to when his wife's fertile time ends and she enters into the post-ovulation part of her cycle (the "honeymoon" time!). I therefore help my wife to chart and interpret her physical signs of fertility - and then infertility - in anticipation of being able to renew our marriage covenant by the sacred act of intercourse. Having abstained from sexual relations with her for many days, I am then able to rediscover the mystery of her person in the physical act of uniting with her. The fact that I am so intimately involved with my wife's personhood as a sexual being, no doubt improves communication between us, enhances "psychological bonding," and improves self-esteem for both of us. This has no doubt been the experience of the great majority of couples that have practiced natural family planning for a long enough period of time to overcome the initial difficulty of practicing periodic abstinence.

Contrary to popular opinion, the practice of abstinence helps married couples to discover who they really are as sexual beings, and to experience sexual relations in a profound and enriching way by presenting themselves to each other in an act of self-giving love. When a man practices abstinence, he takes hold of a virtue which allows him to give up his stake in a predominantly eros-based love, freeing him to experience a "fuller sexuality" that leads to greater intimacy with his wife, and supports the total physical, moral and psychological health of the woman and the man.

Breastfeeding and Charting with the Ovulation Method

By Colleen Moscone

My husband and I started using the Billings Ovulation Method when our first son was about 16 months old. We had been using the method for just two cycles when we decided to try for our second child. We must have been paying close attention in class during the “how to” portion, as we became pregnant that month! Very excited about our next baby, I soon forgot about the information presented in the classes that we had just completed. Needless to say, I was just starting to understand my cycles, and signs of fertility.

Nine months later, God blessed us with a baby girl! My daughter and I were off to a great start. I felt confident feeding her just about anywhere. I didn't worry about how many ounces she was drinking; I let the scales tell me that. It also gave us an opportunity to relax and share special time together.

Breastfeeding was going well but my charting was a different story. I became so overwhelmed about learning how to manage two young children at home, that I didn't take the time to review how to use the method while breastfeeding. In addition, I was still experiencing bleeding two months after delivery. This is when it would have been helpful to study what I had learned in class. I thought charting didn't need to begin until lochia subsided, but this is incorrect. Recording should begin three weeks after delivery no matter the circumstances. To get my body back on track, my doctor recommended a D& C. After the operation, I basically noticed a pattern of dry days, so I didn't start charting until I noticed signs of cervical mucus.

Delaying charting was a big mistake! By this time my daughter was already seven months old! She had been weaned from some feedings, was eating solids, drinking additional fluids and sleeping through the night. In addition, we battled with thrush, numerous ear infections and a hectic travel schedule. I regret not have having all of this information recorded along with my daily patterns. It would

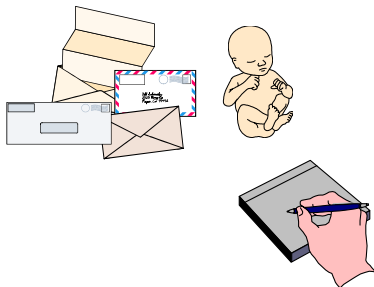
have been nice to compare her feedings, changes in temperament, etc., to what I was experiencing. To top it off, I even forgot to use the chart for breastfeeding mothers!

Though there was a delay in charting, I mentally followed the early day rule on dry days. Since I was experiencing such a long pattern of dry days, the early day rule actually worked well for my husband and I. The difficult time arose after my daughter was seven months old and I started observing more cervical mucus. This was a frequent occurrence, especially two months prior to having my first menstrual cycle. For about eight weeks it felt as though I was always charting wet, stretchy, thick or sticky mucus, and even spotting. This created a lot of anxiety for me, especially being a new user of this method. I didn't want to make a mistake. It felt as though my husband and I were following peak day rules all the time. We started to notice tension in our sexual relationship. Even though my husband believes in this method 100%, and is very understanding, it can still get frustrating. I wanted us to be very conservative in our approach as I didn't feel my body nor our family was ready for another pregnancy just yet.

When I finally did ovulate it was obvious. I experienced wet, stretchy, lubricative mucus, just like in the past. There were only nine days between peak day and menstruation instead of the normal eleven days or more. My daughter was fully weaned at 10 ½ months, just two days before I started my cycle.

Reflecting back, I can't believe I let so many critical steps to Natural Family Planning slip by. I pray that God will bless us with more children, so I can try this again! For the future, I realize the importance of following the rules, such as consistent charting, using the appropriate chart (for breastfeeding mothers) and noting information about the baby. Contacting teachers about questions, concerns and chart review is also very helpful.

TLC MAIL



SEND LETTERS to or Call:

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I'm in my 11th month of nursing and am experiencing hot flashes. Is this normal?

Hot flashes during nursing are not uncommon. Just knowing that hot flashes are normal and a reflection of the hormone estrogen can minimize the stress of having hot flashes. Diet, exercise, and herbs often control hot flashes without the use of synthetic hormones. For support while nursing you may wish to contact your NFP teacher and your local La Leche League. The spring issue of TLC will have an article on hot flashes.



Dear TLC,

